



## **United States Mission to the OSCE**

# **Response to Report to the Permanent Council by Ambassador Bernd Borchardt, Head of the OSCE Presence in Albania**

As delivered by Chargé d'Affaires, a.i. Kate Byrnes  
to the Permanent Council, Vienna  
November 24, 2016

The United States welcomes Ambassador Borchardt for his first report to the Permanent Council. Congratulations, Ambassador, on your assignment to the OSCE Presence in Albania, and thank you for your comprehensive and detailed assessment of the mission's work. We recognize the excellent work that you and your team are doing to support the implementation of key reforms in Albania at both the national and local levels. Your targeted, technical support ensures that key areas of strategic concern to Albania and OSCE participating States are given the highest priority.

Earlier this year, the United States and Albania celebrated the 25th anniversary of the reestablishment of our diplomatic relations. As Secretary of State John Kerry recently said, the United States and Albania are friends, partners, and NATO Allies, and we have enormous mutual interests and a special relationship. Albania is on the path toward full Euro-Atlantic integration, making necessary reforms to strengthen its democratic institutions.

With the help of the OSCE, Albania has made significant progress in a number of sectors, including combatting corruption and organized crime, countering violent extremism, and reforming the judiciary. Moreover, as Ambassador Borchardt's report highlighted, the Albanian parliament's unanimous vote in July to amend its Constitution in pursuit of judicial reform was a hard-won victory that marks a new beginning for fighting corruption and diminishing political influence over the judiciary. The OSCE Presence contributed to this achievement, working with Albanian and international experts to identify deficits in the system and develop a strategic framework for the future. The amendments are a crucial step in ensuring the judiciary functions for the benefit of all Albanian citizens. We continue to encourage the Albanian government and parliament to enact the necessary implementing legislation without delay to move this vital reform forward, which will strengthen democratic institutions.

Ambassador Borchardt, you noted that the fight against corruption remains one of the main challenges for Albania's government. Despite seeing progress in terms of drafting anti-corruption policy and a legislative framework, your report highlights that more needs to be done to enforce existing legislation and to enhance the independence of anti-corruption institutions. To this end, we applaud the OSCE Presence's collaboration with civil society and the private sector to foster engagement on this issue, build capacity within institutions, and

promote local-level transparency through the provision of technical expertise. We welcome the fact that in 2017, the OSCE Presence will support work in the fight against illicit drugs, organized crime, and corruption. The United States also supports the OSCE Presence's work alongside the Albanian government on election-related issues and the electoral reform process. Your provision of experts and other support for this reform effort is crucial to the successful administration of parliamentary elections.

Albania continues to be a committed partner in countering violent extremism. In 2015, the government adopted its National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE). This year, the government appointed a new Assistant to the Prime Minister and National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism, Mr. Agron Sojati, who is overseeing the implementation of Albania's National CVE Strategy. We welcome Mr. Sojati's appointment and believe that his work with educational institutions, religious groups, the media, youth leadership, civil society, and the government is critical. Ambassador Borchardt, we also appreciate the engagement by the OSCE Presence on CVE. It co-hosted and participated in a series of initiatives related to CVE, including a roundtable event led by the Albanian Muslim Community, a regional tabletop exercise with the United States and Partnership for Peace Consortium, and a conference with the Elbasan Muslim Community and Municipality. The United States is pleased to support these efforts, and looks forward to working closely with the Government of Albania on its comprehensive approach to increasing tolerance and countering violent extremism.

Finally, in looking toward Albania's expected parliamentary elections in 2017, the United States calls on the country's political leaders to redouble efforts to address the recommendations made by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) following parliamentary elections in 2013 and local elections in 2015. As ODIHR concluded, more work needs to be done to enhance public confidence in the electoral process, including ensuring that state resources are not abused for campaign purposes, increasing the transparency of political party and campaign finances, and implementing strict and clear laws against vote buying. These and other recommendations should be implemented well in advance of the next parliamentary elections.

Thank you again, Ambassador Borchardt, for the OSCE Presence's hard work and dedication in helping Albania move forward on its democratic, Euro-Atlantic path. We encourage your close partnership with the government, parliament, civil society, and other key stakeholders to ensure Albania continues to meet its OSCE commitments. We look forward to your continued success in 2017.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

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